

从符号学角度看翻译的创造性过程

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## 从符号学角度看翻译的过程

On the Process of Translation from a Semiotic Perspective

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## Abstract

Translation studies in China can be traced back to the Han Dynasty when the Buddhist scripture translators looked for principles to apply to translation activities. In traditional translation studies, Yan Fu's principles about translation have played an influential role, which are "being faithful, expressive, and elegant". Although some later translation theorists have put forward new principles, Chinese translation studies remained stagnant and stereotyped in theoretical inquiry (Jiang Xiaohua, 2003:24).

Since the 1980s, a large number of Western translation theories have been introduced to China, many of which revolve around the concept of "Equivalence". However, the concept of "Equivalence" has been challenged in different ways. Fully aware of the importance of the problem of achieving equivalence in translation studies, some Western translation researchers start to seek new perspectives to look at equivalence and the translation process. Semiotic translation research emerges against this background.

In recent years, some of our Chinese scholars are making an attempt to do translation studies from a semiotic perspective. Their translation explorations are under the influence of Saussurean semiology, Peircian semiotics and sociosemiotics. According to the theories of Saussure and Peirce, it is logically impossible to attain equivalence between two language signs. In terms of sociosemiotics, language signs should be analyzed and interpreted in the social-cultural context as well as in the framework of sign systems. A semiotic perspective makes translation studies more motivational and scientific. Translation, viewed from a semiotic perspective, is an ongoing process.

This thesis focuses on translation process from a modern semiotic perspective, aiming at the basic categories of meta-language. The characteristics of meta-language confirms translation practice a never ending process.

To sum up, there are two innovative points in this thesis. Firstly, research has already proved that equivalence in translation is impossible from the perspective of Peircian semiotics, and this thesis proves that it is also impossible from the perspective of Saussurean semiology. Secondly, this thesis combines translation theories with practice to illustrate the makeup of meta-language in the translation

process, which will help to pave the path for further relevant studies.

**Key Words:** translation principles; theory of equivalence; semiotics; meta-language

厦门大学博硕士论文摘要库



## 摘要

中国的翻译研究可以追溯到汉代的佛家经文翻译,当时的翻译研究是为了寻求指导翻译活动的理论。在传统的翻译研究中,严复的“信达雅”的翻译原则影响最为远大。尽管后来其他的翻译理论家提出了一些新的原则,但是中国翻译研究在理论探索方面却没有表现出明显的进步(蒋骁华, 2003:24)。

自上世纪八十年代以来,我国引入了大量的西方翻译理论,其中许多研究主要是围绕着“对等”概念展开的。然而“对等”概念在多方面却受到了挑战。西方翻译理论研究者意识到“对等”问题在翻译研究中的重要性,于是开始寻求新的途径来研究“对等”以及翻译过程。在此背景下,符号学角度的翻译研究应运而生。

近年来,我国有学者尝试从符号学角度进行翻译研究。这些方面的探索主要是受到索绪尔符号学、皮尔斯符号学和社会符号学的影响。根据索绪尔符号学和皮尔斯符号学,一个语言符号与另一个语言符号之间的对等在逻辑上是不可能的。根据社会符号学,语言符号的分析解读不仅发生在符号系统的框架中,而且需要联系不同的社会和文化背景。符号学的视角使得翻译研究更具有理据性和科学性。在符号学看来,翻译是一种永无止境的过程。

本论文从现代符号学角度研究翻译,着眼于元语言的基本范畴。元语言的特点表明了翻译实践是一个永无止境的过程。

概括起来,本研究有两个创新点。第一,已有的研究证明了从皮尔斯符号学角度看,翻译对等是不可能的,而本研究运用索绪尔符号学,进一步证明了翻译对等的不可能性。第二,本研究从现代符号学出发,结合翻译实践,论述了翻译过程中元语言的构成,这对今后的相关研究起到了铺垫作用。

**关键词:** 翻译原则; 对等理论; 符号学; 元语言

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## Introduction

When it comes to translation, many people usually have the biased notion that translation can be done with a relatively large body of language knowledge and several dictionaries.

But this simple linguistic approach to translation may create a variety of conflicts in practice. Look at this sentence: “New food crops were introduced, mainly from the Indian Ocean”. Literally it may be translated into “新的粮食作物传入，这主要来自印度洋。” This, however, cannot be the real meaning of the English sentence, because “the Indian Ocean” is not a piece of land and cannot produce any land crops. Geological and linguistic knowledge forces the translator to change the concept of “the Indian Ocean” and translate it into “印度洋沿岸地区” (Yang Shizhuo, 2012: vi). Actually, the change of the concept is due to a rhetorical device, called metonymy, which uses one thing to substitute another thing close to it in order to draw more attention.

As each language has its own system of linguistic and extra-linguistic devices to achieve its communication purpose, translation is a more complicated process under many interwoven constraints, which demands scientific guidance of translation theories.

Although some prominent translation theories have so far exerted a significant influence on translation practice, it is beneficial to approach translation from new perspectives. This thesis begins in Chapter One with a review into translation research in China, including the traditional translation principles and the most influential translation theory of equivalence introduced from the West. Also, the problem of the concept of “equivalence” is briefly discussed.

Chapter Two firstly tackles the problem of equivalence between signs of two languages from the perspectives of Saussurean semiology and Peircian semiotics. In semiotics, equivalence between two language signs cannot be attained. In fact, translation is an ongoing process. This chapter presents translation studies under the influence of Saussurean semiology, Peircian semiotics and sociosemiotics, respectively. According to Saussurean semiology (Saussure, 1980:170), any language sign should be analyzed along the syntagmatic axis and paradigmatic axis. According

to Peircian semiotics (Lu Qiaodan, et al., 2005:50), the interpretation of a sign is connected with other signs, so translators' subjectivity is brought into play in connecting a sign with other signs. From the sociosemiotic perspective, language should be taken and interpreted in the social-cultural context as well as in the context of all sign systems (Tan Zaixi, 1999:88). The sociosemiotic approach to translation studies focuses on language systems and the codes used in communication (Tan Zaixi, 1999:90) which are referred to as meta-language in semiotics.

Chapter Three deals exclusively with meta-language. It is made up of self-carried meta-language, social meta-language and capacity meta-language. As meta-language is not a fixed set of rules, it constitutes a challenge to the translator's creativity in translation practice, making translation a never-ending process.

In conclusion, this thesis attempts to take a semiotic perspective to look at the translation process. When the theory of equivalence gives rise to controversy, a semiotic perspective dilutes the controversy by demonstrating that translation is a never-ending process that is full of creativity. In the future, a semiotic approach will be more productively used in translation studies.



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